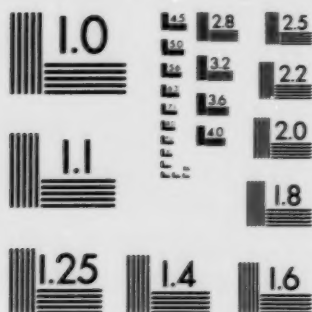


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EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Report No. 83:5

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATURE AND EFFECTIVENESS
OF HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

J. McElgunn

REPORTS



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Parents' Perceptions
of
The Nature and Effectiveness
of Home-School
Communication Patterns

by

Juleen McElgunn

B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 1975

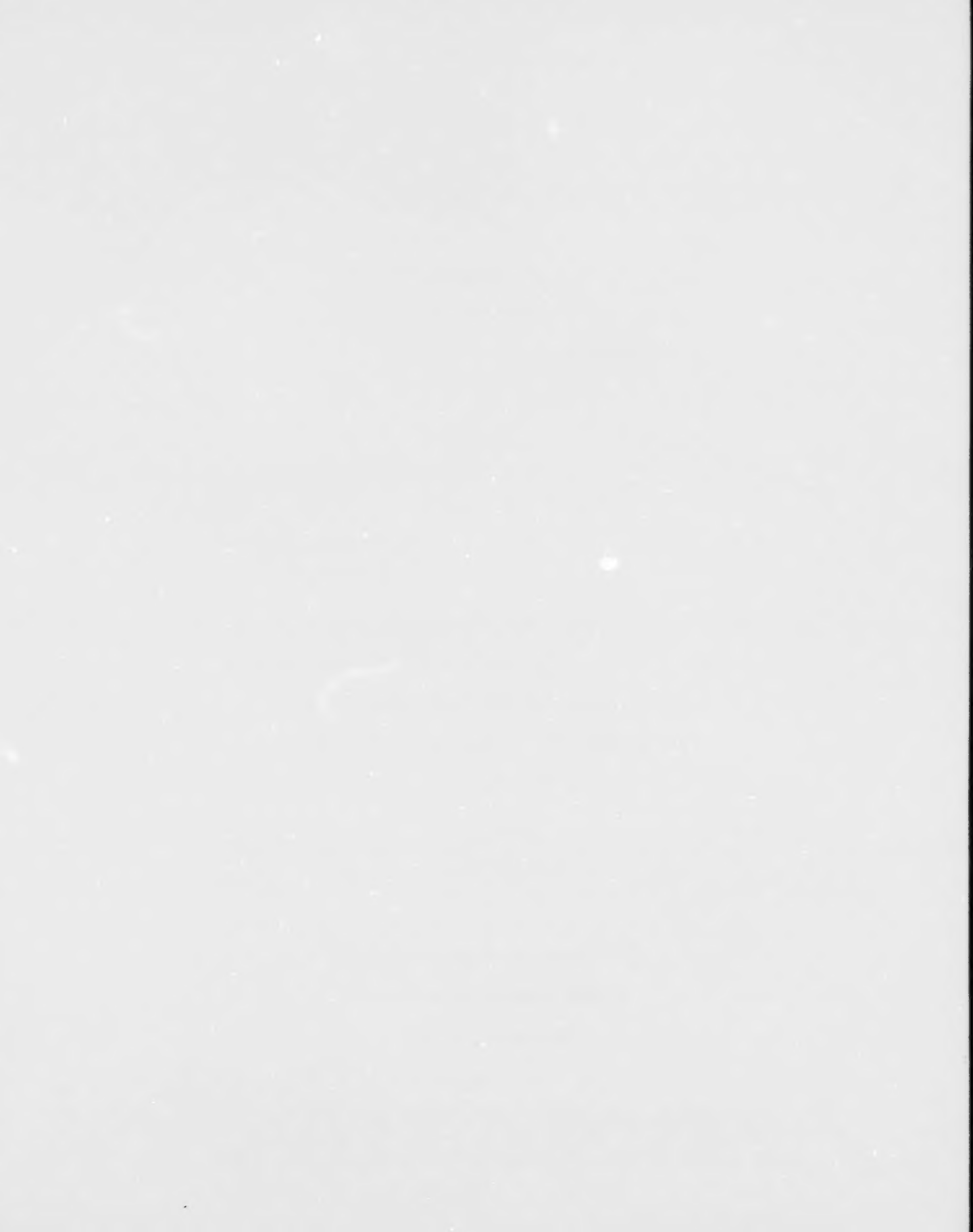
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THE REQUIREMENTS FOR EDUCATION 881 AND PARTIAL
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THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION
in the Faculty
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ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been an increased focus on community and/or parent involvement in education and on how schools communicate with the home and vice versa. Writers have examined how interactions between school and home might enhance education in communities.

This study investigated parent-school interactions along five dimensions addressed through the following five problem statements:

1. What are the most frequent ways in which schools communicate with parents?
2. What are the most important sources of information from which parents learn about schools?
3. What are the most effective ways for parents to communicate with schools?
4. To what extent do parents want involvement in making school-based decisions?
5. To what extent does the level of education and/or occupation influence the amount of involvement parents want in making school-based decisions?

Data were collected through a survey adapted from work done by Bonnie Sloan in her study of school-home communications in Toledo, Ohio. The survey was randomly distributed to 400 parents of children in the public schools of the Abbotsford School District in British Columbia. Completed surveys were returned by 215 parents (53.8%).

The results of the study indicate that:

1. The most important source of information from the



school to the home is the child.

2. Other information sources were (in order of importance): report cards, the school's newsletter, parent-teacher conferences, personal visits, teachers' notes or phone calls, and conversations with friends or neighbours.
3. The most effective method for parents to communicate with the school was through a direct approach by phone or in person. Parent-teacher conferences or school volunteer were also relatively effective.
4. Regarding parent involvement in school-based decisions, most parents wanted only to be informed rather than involved in the issues. The one exception was parents of children with learning problems, they desired high involvement.
5. Only a very few parents wanted complete control over decisions being made in schools on the sixteen issues presented to them.
6. Occupation appeared to have little effect on parents' chosen degree of involvement in school issues.
7. The higher the level of education, the greater the involvement in school decision-making.

This study sheds some light on the home-school interactions of one school district. From this base, research might be conducted in other school districts using the same survey to ascertain if similar patterns exist in other districts. Educators can plan to increase their use of these preferred sources to improve school-home communications.



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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Education in British Columbia during the early and mid 1800's was not taken very seriously; students attended irregularly and schools and supplies were few. It was not until the government passed the Common School Act of 1865 that the cost of education in common schools was assumed by the government. The number of schools and pupils attending them increased due to the cost factor involved in getting an education having been removed. Johnson (1957) also notes:

"This 'Common School Act, 1865' established a general board of education to hold and manage all school property and made provision for a superintendent of education to act as the agent of the board. The central authority appointed by the governor, had power to establish schools, to prescribe course of study, textbooks, and rules for conducting schools, and to inspect schools. Even the appointment of teachers was the prerogative of the governor. Under such a highly centralized system of administration there was no distinct need for local authorities, and the act provided merely that the governor might appoint a local board of three trustees in any school district if he considered it expedient so to do. The schools were to give no denominational teaching and were to be open to all" (p. 160).

Seven years later, the Public Schools Act (1872) was passed. The Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council was empowered to appoint a six-man Board of Education and a Superintendent of Education who would be 'ex officio' chairman of the board. He would also establish new school districts and make grants to defray the full cost of education in an area. Johnson (1964) relates:

"The new Act made the office of Superintendent a one-man department, the central official in a highly centralized system. ... he was empowered to license teachers, appoint them, pay them, inspect them, determine what they should teach and from what textbooks, and decide what holidays they should have" (p. 45).

In addition, three-man boards were elected in each district, but at this time their powers were limited to calling school meetings, receiving and disbursing funds, keeping in good repair the school buildings and equipment, ensuring that only the authorized textbooks were used and that in general the schools were conducted according to the regulations as set out by the superintendent.

Gradually as towns and school districts increased in size, the school boards took on an ever increasing role in the educational decision-making which had formally been the sole duty of the Superintendent of Education.

This increase in the role of the school boards in the educational decision-making of schools resulted in a more centralized structure of operation. As a result of this, the community and especially parents had less opportunity for direct input into school issues.

Over the past several decades, many educators, parents, and community members have expressed concern over the lack of community involvement and participation in schools due to this centralized nature of school structure. This system tends to be perceived by the community as a method of isolating them and creates barriers to effective communication and participation. Those who are concerned regarding this issue would like to see changes made which provide for more community input

into the educational process. Instead of communication being one-sided or one-way from school to home, with little parental participation they would like to see a two-way interaction between the school and the home. Research on the area of community initiated (that is community involvement and participation) with schools has been relatively neglected (Saxe, 1975; Davies, 1976). As well other researchers such as Edwards (1977); Brinkley (1980), and others indicate that parents do desire involvement in schools.

With community demand for accountability and a desire for greater participation in educational decision-making, it would seem necessary for educators to develop acceptable methods to elicit information on ways in which parents wish to learn about and be involved in schools. From this, educators might develop the means to provide involvement and participation which meets both the needs of the community and those of educators.

Statement of the Problem

This study investigated parent-school interaction along the following dimensions:

1. ways in which schools communicate with parents,
2. parents' perceptions of the most important ways in which schools communicate with them,
3. parents' perceptions of the most effective ways in which they communicate with the school,
4. parents' desires for involvement in making school based decisions.

Sub-Problem 1.0

What are the most frequent ways in which schools communicate with parents?

Sub-Problem 2.0

What are the most important sources of information from which parents learn about the school?

Sub-Problem 3.0

What are the most effective ways for parents to communicate with the school?

Sub-Problem 4.0

To what extent do parents want involvement in making school based decisions?

Sub-Problem 5.0

To what extent does the level of education and/or occupation in the work force have on the amount of involvement parents may desire in making school based decisions?

Significance of the Study

This study has two dimensions. It is hoped this paper will shed some light on the first dimension, that of how parents perceive the communication process between their child's school and their homes. The examination of this communication process between the schools and homes may help educators single out areas of concern where present school to home channels are not providing for adequate feedback from the home and therefore reduce rather than increase two-way communication flow.

The second dimension examined in this study is that of parent participation and involvement in schools. By analyzing parent responses on a variety of school issues, educators may discover areas where parents can be effectively involved in schools in ways which enhance rather than detract from the educational process. In addition this may open up further areas for effective two-way communication between the school and the home. If parents are involved in the school, the communication process can benefit.

A study of this size can not hope to cover every aspect of parent participation and involvement in schools, but the information provided through the study may help educators realize and focus on the need for processes within schools which include parent input. With parent input the communication process becomes a circle providing new insights which can improve the educational system.

Definition of Terms

Centralized: the concentrating by the placing of power and authority in a center or central organization. An example would be the school boards as a center of authority in a school district.

Decentralized: the dispersion or distribution of functions and powers from a central authority to regional and local

authorities. An example would be a school board allowing a parent group to participate in decision-making activities relating to school matters.

Communication: a process by which information is exchanged between individuals or groups through a common system of symbols, signs or behavior. Effective communication is a two-way process.

Participation: to take part or share in something or some activity.

Involvement: to engage as an active participant in some activity.

One-Way Communication: a communication process whereby ideas, thoughts etc, flow from one source to another, but are not paraphrased and returned to the sender. An example of this type of communication would be communication initiated by the school and sent outward from the school to the home with no return communication from the home to the school.

Two-way Communication: a communication process whereby ideas, thoughts, etc, flow from one source to another and are reformed or paraphrased and returned to the sender. This process helps to ensure that what the person or person(s) is sending in the message is perceived by the receiver correctly. An example would be when communication flows from the school to the home and then from the home to the school, with understanding being the common goal.

Overview of the Study

In the first chapter, the four dimensions of the study have been described. Further delineation is made with the five sub-problems which stem from the central problem of the study. In addition the implications for education of this study have been discussed. A definition of terms has been included to clarify the meanings of words used throughout the paper.

Chapter II will examine the background to the study under three main sections: School-Community Relations, Parent to School/School to Parent Communication, and Parent Involvement in School Decision-Making.

Chapter III is concerned with research methodology and it outlines the research procedures followed in this study. It contains a description of the data required in order to conduct

the study and provides the sources of the data. The setting for the study is also discussed. The data collection and treatment is described.

Chapter IV is concerned with the analysis and discussion of the survey results.

Chapter V focuses on the conclusions and implications arising from this study.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

School-Community Relations

The relationship between schools and the home was a closely knit one more than eighty years ago. Gradually the pressures of urbanization created an ever widening gap in the interactions between the school and the home. Berger (1981) relates that:

"Originally families had the prime responsibility for education of their children. When formal education joined with informal education, parents still had decision-making rights in regard to their child's schooling. In colonial days the church and family were the major institutions for the socialization of children. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the community school increased in importance, but parents were still involved in decision-making. Schools were small. Many country schools were dispersed across the nation, and school teachers were hired by the local school board, lived in the community, and were responsible to the local school district. Between 1890 and 1920 there was a shift from community to urban schools. The dramatic change from a rural society to an urban society resulted in a change in the control of schools. The process transferred control of schools from the community to the professionals. Consolidation of rural schools into a larger, centrally located school improved equipment, facilities, and diversity of staff, but it took away parent influence. From the 1920s until the 1970s the steady flow from rural to urban areas increased the separation of school and families" (p. 67).

The transferring of control from community to professionals radically changed school-community relations in education. Where previous to this parents were actively involved in education, they gradually became less involved and the school-home bond was greatly weakened.

During the 1960s sweeping changes occurred in many areas; social and civil right, citizen involvement in government and education and the family structure. One such change that of

children from an economic asset (helping their parents with the family business or farm) to a financial liability (through expenditure for schooling etc.) produced an awareness in parents that their involvement in schools was important to ensure their child received the education necessary to successful development in life. This concern helped to generate methods whereby the school-home bond could be re-examined and perhaps strengthened.

U.S. Government War on Poverty programs brought about educational projects such as Title I, Head Start, and Follow Through to aid disadvantaged children and in turn helped increase school-community relations for parents of these children. Berger (1981) states:

"As research indicated that parent involvement and family background were positively correlated with academic success, the inclusion of parents in their child's education program was entrenched from the beginning of the Head Start program" (p. 64).

These government projects strongly urged and developed the need for parental involvement in the programs for them to succeed. As parents of disadvantaged children became more involved, so did parents of children in regular school through U.S. Government mandates. Again Berger says:

"Head Start's influence was also felt in the public schools where parent components were mandated in many federally funded programs" (p. 65)

and

"Parents began to question programs and their participation with schools and teachers. Forced integration and required busing continued to be an issue confronting schools and parents. Without family co-operation the schools were powerless to find an appropriate solution. Parents and schools had to work together in a partnership to have the educational system work, and parents were interested in participating" (p. 67).

As a result of these government programs and of private studies researched by such groups as the Institute for Responsive Education and the National Citizens Committee for Education there was a greater awareness for the need for an increase in school-community interaction.

In addition many smaller studies relate success stories of methods for increasing the role of the community in the schools. One of the most prominent and widely used methods is for a school or district to develop an advisory, parent or community council. The council usually comprises members from all facets of the community. The role of the council varies from that of a quasi-council, administrative council to political council with involvement in the educational decision-making process. Brinkley (1980) states:

"An effective council can build bridges between school professionals and parents: it can serve as an arbiter between the conflicting interests of parents, and children, and those of school professionals" (p. 7).

Another method of providing interactions between schools and parents themselves is the Parent-Teacher Associations. However, P.T.A.'s are experiencing a decline in both their numbers and ability to exercise influence on the education

system. From a 1971 survey for the British Columbia Parent and Teacher Federation of 700 local presidents and 800 other parents, Stamp (1975) relates:

"While parents wanted a say in the education of their children, they were unconvinced about the value of the P.T.A. Asked how much longer the provincial movement could exist, 70% of the respondents were unsure, 13% said 4 or more years, 11% said 1 - 3 years, and 4% replied "should have been disbanded this year " (p. 74-75).

Stamp and other writers suggest that "new blood" and strongly-identified meaningful issues may rejuvenate the P.T.A. resulting in needed community input into the educational system.

Information by such writers as Gordon (1976); Olsen (1945); and Ryan (1976), indicate that methods such as the above-mentioned provide for decentralization in education which can result in greater community involvement. But what works effectively in one school or district may be disastrous in another. Because of the nature of schools and communities, these writers feel input into the educational system should come from all parts of the community, thereby providing a wide base from which a strong satisfying school system can develop.

In addition, a body of information by such writers as Saxe (1975); Brinkley (1980); Sloan (1973), and others indicate that parents and community have a right to an equal partnership in the educational interaction between the school and the community. Brinkley states:

"It is a parents' right to be effectively involved in decisions and policies that will affect his child's educational well being" (p. 7).

To achieve a more equal partnership with the home, schools must provide for increased communication between the two groups. Saxe (1975) and others relate that one-way communication is common throughout most school systems. He describes this method of communication as "public relations" which are initiated by educators to influence the public on school issues. Lucas and Lusthaus (1977) state:

"Traditionally, school-community relations programs have been concerned mainly with public relations activities of the "how-to-tell-the-school-story" variety. In the terminology of systems theory, this emphasis reflects the natural concern of a system for generating output that is supportive of its existence" (p. 385).

and

" 'one-way' information-giving tends to assume that meaning resides in the message, rather than in the intended receiver's perception and interpretation of the message" (p. 385).

It would seem that schools could utilize more effective methods of communication which provide interaction and not just a one-way information flow.

An increased awareness of these interaction difficulties has resulted in work on the utilization of two-way communication or "community relations" as Saxe (1975) labels the term.

Saxe's definition of community relations is a broad one.

He relates:

"Community relations will include all the interactions between any element of the school and any element of the community" (p. 8)

and

"Almost nothing happens in a school that is not or can not become the community's business. Little happens in the community that can not become the schools' business: (p. 9).

Saxe (1975) and Ryan (1976) note that school-community relations should be a two-way street with respect to communication flow. Morrison (1978) notes:

"In the parent involvement process, the interaction between parent and educational program should be viewed as a reciprocal one of two-way interaction. The central question then becomes, "How can the parents help us and how can we help the parents" (p. 22).

The issue of school-community relations is a complex and diverse one. Many educational writers are striving to provide insight into the central problems which relate to this important question. The main emphasis remains however that the community must, through some method be able to 'relate', 'interact', or 'communicate' with the educators in the school system. Without this, educating children can not be a two-way street for schools and the community.

Parent to School and School to Parent Communication

From the broad area of school-community relations, it is essential for the purpose of this study to examine the more specific areas of parent to school and school to parent communication.

Lucas and Lusthaus (1977) describe the phenomenon of a "concept of communications boundary." They relate:

"that parents have an image of the 'communications boundaries' of their children's schools and that knowledge of this image is basic to the school's development of audience-oriented communication. Specifically, the notion of communication boundary derives from the theory that systems, including educational organizations, are bounded by patterns of behavior which include or exclude exchanges with their social environment" (p. 386).

They go on to explain that:

"Schools, then, might be regarded as relatively 'open' or 'closed' depending upon the degree to which their communication boundaries are permeable to parental input. At an extreme of openness, for example, a parental input (1) could be communicated by the route that would be most immediate and direct for the parent; (2) could be communicated to any member of the school staff; (3) could be critical of the school as well as supportive and (4) could be expected to have some actual impact on the school other than eliciting a symbolic response intended to placate and deflect. Conversely, an extremely closed situation would impose elaborately defensive procedures for monitoring communication and for warding off in particular anything non-supportive of the status quo" (p. 385).

An example of problems relating to a closed situation as discussed by Sloan (1973) in her study are that:

"Some of the barriers to open communication are: (1) the feelings conveyed to parents by schools that the school has all the answers and that the parents' opinion is unimportant, and (2) a belief that a call to school means trouble" (p. 19).

Lucas and Lusthaus (1977) state further:

"that parental perceptions of the communications boundaries of their schools do vary in relation to basic characteristics of schools and of parent communities" (p. 388).

The orientation of parents towards communication with the school relates not only to the "open" or "closed" nature of the school, but also as Sloan (1973) notes to:

"(1) past experiences with schools during a parents' childhood; (2) value systems held in regard to education; (3) conflicting pressures or strains within the family; (4) perception of themselves as parents; (5) economic needs; (6) goals which parents hold for their children; (7) how they perceive the school assisting or preventing these goals; (8) degrees of insight, intelligence, and motivation within the parents, and (9) their support system" (p. 19).

Conversely there are many factors which influence the orientation of schools toward communication with the parent. She also feels these include:

"(1) internal communication network of the school; (2) fears, attitudes, and stereotypes held by staff members; (3) existence of 'avoidance mechanisms'; (4) programs which involve parents; (5) ability of the school to 'receive' or 'listen'; (6) administrative leadership; (7) perception of itself as actor or reactor; (8) frequency and content of staff communication; and (9) relationships with parents" (p. 22).

It would seem from these and other writers that how parents actually view the approachability and assessibility of their schools relates to their orientation to the school and the schools' orientation to them. The reverse would seem to be true for schools. The effectiveness of the communication flow depends then, on the many factors as mentioned above.

Lucas and Lusthaus (1977) discovered several issues relating to the increased "openness" of schools which would seem to enhance parent to school and school to parent communication. These were that: 1) the more contacts parents had with their schools, the more they perceived them as open; 2) elementary parents regarded their schools as distinctly more open than secondary parents did; 3) the more parents were satisfied with the quality of education their children received, the more they perceived the school as being open; and 4) the higher the education level of parents, the more they perceived their school as open.

These are areas to be looked at which may shed some light on more effective communication interchanges between the schools

and parents. In addition it would seem that a more positive orientation on both the parts of parents and the school may result in an effective communication network between school to parent and parent to school. If established, the two-way communication process has the benefit of not only an increased communication flow, between the two groups, but also has the side benefit of an increase in parental involvement in the school.

Parent Involvement in School Decision-Making

Parents have been involved in the education and schooling of their children for years. Berger (1981) relates:

"Parental involvement in the education of children has been present since prehistoric time. The family provided the first informal education for the child through modeling, teaching, and praise or discipline. From the time of early Egyptian, Sumerian, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman day, parents were actively involved in the selection of teachers and the education of their children" (p. 69).

Writers such as Brinkley (1980); Edwards (1977); and Ryan (1976), all believe that parents are a vital part of the education process and should be involved as partners in the education system. It is working together as Ryan notes:

"... the idea of a community educating itself... through partnership" (p. 17).

Edwards (1977) believes in the parents' right to participate in the educational process. She states:

"I have always believed that parents are consumers with a vital interest in their childrens' academic achievement and must exert a controlling presence in the public school system... I also believe that only an informed parent body can demand and make the basic changes necessary to achieve excellence in education" (p. 60).

Through U.S. programs such as Head Start and Follow Through it has been discovered that parents do want to be involved in their children's education.

Gordon (1976) states that:

"We know that parents, when properly approached, want to be involved in the education of their children. They will become involved in a variety of ways when approached as equal partners on their own territory in ways that make sense to them" (p. 10).

In its 1979 study on Public Involvement in Educational Decisions, the Canadian Education Association discovered that 36.1% (a significant percentage) felt parents' involvement in school activities had increased since they themselves were in school. However what type and how much involvement was not indicated.

Some writers are concerned that the view of parent involvement is one of parents helping only with bake sales, fun fairs, etc. Morrison (1978) defines true parent involvement as:

"a process of actualizing the potential of parents; of helping parents discover their strengths, potentialities, and talents; and of using them for the benefit of themselves and the family.... The parent becomes the focus of development. Without this comprehensive definition, parent involvement runs the risk of being a sham and a self-serving endeavor" (p. 22).

Educators and community members have asked the question: "If parents want participation in schools, how can we provide it?" Saxe (1975) looks at this question and describes the formal levels of citizen participation in education through the use of Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation and School Policy Formation. (See Figure 1). He notes:

"Terms at the top of the table describe degrees of citizen power - citizen control, delegated power, and partnership. The central three levels describe degrees of token representation - placation, consultation, and informing. The lowest terms describe arrangements that permit no participation at all for citizens" (p. 231).

FIGURE 1

ARNSTEIN'S LADDER OF CITIZEN
PARTICIPATION AND SCHOOL POLICY FORMATION

Participation Level	Educational Equivalent
Citizen Control	Free schools, complete community control
Delegated Power	Community control of specific areas (e.g., personnel)
Partnership	Joint Policy Boards (The Woodlawn Experimental Project)
Placation	Citizens on board of control (places usually allocated to representatives of groups on either community or central board of education)
Consultation	Local community hearings, surveys, needs assessment
Informing	Public relations practices, media, bulletins, letters
Therapy	Parent educational programs. Recruitment of local leaders by paraprofessional salaries and socialization to educator norms.
Manipulation	Token advisory committees dominated by professionals or friends.

Source: R.W. Saxe, School-Community Interaction,
(Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing, 1975), p. 231

The educational equivalents on the right of the chart are provided as illustrative examples of Arnstein's levels of citizen participation.

Saxe (1975) emphasizes that:

"the placement of a practise at a lower level is not an assessment of the usefulness of the practise. For example, needs assessment can be an example of token participation if that is the extent of citizen participation. When used in conjunction with other levels of citizen participation, needs assessment become a valuable necessary practise in school-community relations" (p. 232).

Arnstein's levels are only formal arrangements for participation with specific practises alone or in combination determining the actual participation level outcome.

At this time it should be noted that in this study question four on the questionnaire has been set up using six categories which approximate the participation levels of Arnstein's Ladder. (See Appendix B).

To continue, it would seem from the body of research to date that many writers feel Arnstein's participation level of "citizen power" has not yet been accomplished. However, it would seem that the three levels under "citizen power" are viewed by some educational writers (Saxe, 1975) as the best or ideal involvement levels for citizens.

Some authors' work indicates that the other levels of participation as outlined by Arnstein have met with varying success depending on the school and district situation.

However Robinson (1978) in his study on advisory committees in the Vancouver School District relates:

"These committees have produced administrative rather than political participation and consequently have done little to reduce the feeling of powerlessness that many citizens feel in dealing with schools and school boards.... Quite clearly what is needed in education are political mechanisms that provide for more meaningful participation in educational decision-making, particularly at the local school level" (p. 18).

As well, Reed and Mitchell (1975) in their work for the National Committee for Citizens in Education found that advisory committees:

"are founded on an advisory concept rather than one that places them within the decision-making machinery" (p. 210).

and

"no matter how the group is selected, its legitimacy is fragile because its role is confined to being advisory" (p. 210).

It would seem that levels at the top of Arnstein's Ladder might effect some changes in the 'feeling of powerlessness' which these and other citizens may be experiencing due to the mechanisms which presently control community participation in educational decision-making.

Other writers describe participation levels in a variety of ways. Gordon and Breibogel (1976) describe parent involvement in schools as being on several levels but not as clearly defined as "token representation", "citizen power", and "no representation". Their view of parental roles as spokes of one wheel (see Figure 2) provide a looser definition for parent involvement in schools. They stress under the "parent as decision-maker" spoke that there are many ways which citizens can and should be allowed to have input into education decisions.

They note:

"We see all five spokes of the wheel as equal elements rather than as heirarchical ones from low to high. While it is possible to impose an order from 1 to 5 going from least to most influence, we feel that parents as genuine partners will be involved in all spokes so that the wheel can turn" (p. 8).

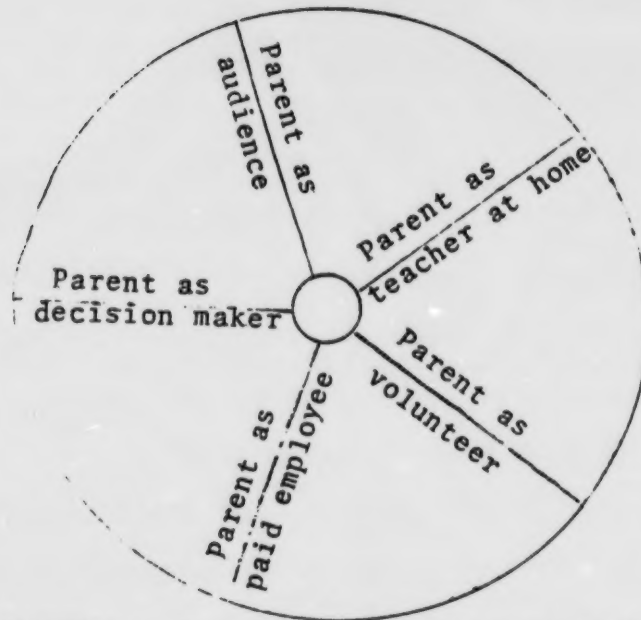


FIGURE 2 The Parent Involvement Model

Source: I.E. Gordon and W.F. Breibogel, Building Effective Home-School Relationships, (Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1976), p. 9.

As in Arnstein's Ladder, Gordon and Breibogel feel that placement of a procedure or practise on a certain level does not necessarily become an assessment of its' usefulness to either educators or parents.

Sloan (1973) found in her study that the majority of parents wanted to be informed on issues. The categories of "participation in making decisions" and "no involvement desired" had much lower percentages of parents choosing them. (See Figure 3). Although the categories are not as specific as those outlined in Arnstein's Ladder of Participation, it would seem parents feel more comfortable at lesser levels of participation.

This raises many issues still to be examined as to what level of participation parents and citizens would prefer in educational matters. Although some writers feel total involvement in educational decision-making by parents is essential, others question the extent to which parents actually desire involvement. Finding the levels which satisfy both the needs of parents and educators requires more detailed study.

SUMMARY

This chapter has covered the background to the study under three main subheadings:

- (1) School-Community Relations
- (2) Parent to School and School to Parent Communication, and
- (3) Parent Involvement in School Decision-Making.

The broader area of school-community relations was discussed with the narrower focus on parent to school and school to parent communication defining the more specific relationship between these two groups.

Under the third sub-heading, levels of parent participation in schools were outlined with the use of Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation and School Policy Formation. It appears that what is termed a desirable level of involvement may vary from individual to individual and from one school setting to another. The actual ideal level or levels of involvement for parents do not appear to be well known at this time.

FIGURE 3
Numbers and Percentage Distribution of Parent Responses
Concerning Perceived Involvement in Relation to Several
Topics

Topics	Number of responses	To be informed: Response percentage	To participate in making decisions: Response percentage	No involvement of any kind: Response percentage
Purchase of major school items	265	69.4	9.4	21.2
Hours of the school day	252	76.7	16.4	7.1
Safety Concerns	276	79.6	16.4	4.0
Field trips	280	84.9	10.9	4.2
What subjects are taught	271	77.6	14.9	7.5
Size of class	255	72.7	17.9	9.4
Clothing children wear to school (Dress code)	273	62.9	32.7	4.4
Homework	273	82.8	12.4	4.8
Pupil evaluation (Report Card)	263	84.6	12.3	3.1
New programs and/or changes	263	78.0	17.7	4.3
Pupil disciplinary policies and procedures	282	69.7	27.4	2.9
Lunch program	254	69.7	13.4	11.9
Learning problems of my child	284	63.1	36.0	.9

Source: B. Sloan, School-Home Communication, (An Educational Specialist Paper, 1973), p. 48.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Required

In order to test the hypotheses, it was necessary to collect the following: data relating to the relative frequency and effectiveness of school to home and home to school communications flow from the perspective of parents, data on the degree of involvement parents would choose on a variety of school-based issues and finally specific demographic data as follows: sex (i.e. father, mother, father and mother, guardian), education and occupation of the respondents.

Setting for the Study

The study was conducted in the large semi-urban/semi-rural school district of Abbotsford in British Columbia. The approximate population of the school district area is 150,000.

There are thirty-one public elementary schools ranging from two two-room country schools, to the largest school which comprises twenty-one rooms and 26.1 teachers.

The community has five secondary schools: three junior secondary (8 to 10) and two senior secondary (11 and 12 with less than 100 grade 10's each).

The total school population at the time of the study was 10,175. Elementary comprised 6777 of this figure while 3398 of the population were at the secondary level.

The area has farming as well as some light industrial as its basic source of revenue.

Socio-economic indicators and other indicators of quality (see Figure 4) as assessed by the Ministry of Education for B.C. indicate that in 1980-1981 Abbotsford school district ranked 51, 30 and 40 for Community Education level, Occupational Status and Family Incomes (respectively) out of the seventy-five school districts in the province. It would appear that the average income for the area is in the middle class range. The educational level appears to be lower than most other districts in the province. This may be due to the farming base for the community. Many fathers pass their farms on to their sons and daughters with the result that, from this researcher's seven years in the district, they do not see the need for high levels of education when a career or business is ready made for them.

The Sample

The population sample for this study was all parents with at least one child attending a school in the above-mentioned district.

The potential sample for this study was selected in the following manner. The thirty-one elementary schools and five secondary schools in the district were asked to randomly select from their school's master list parents' names and addresses. The following formula was used to ensure that as equal a representation as possible was made from each school. Elementary schools with pupil attendance of ninety-nine or less were asked to generate five names per school, those with attendance

FIGURE 4

INDICATORS OF QUALITY 1

1980-81

SECTION	TABLE	MEASURE	VALUE	P10	P25	P50	P75	P90
Financial (1980)								
C	1	Taxable Wealth Assessment per Pupil	58				904	44,758
C	2	Total Mill Rates	73				1048	57,808
C	3	Operating Costs per Pupil	74				584	\$ 2,837
C	4(b)	Teacher Salary Cost (B-1) per Pupil	75				687	\$ 1,702
C	4(b)	Materials & Supplies (B-3) per Pupil	37				89	\$ 1,102
D								
	2	Specific Program Approvals	45				61	6.57
	1	District-Wide Pupil/Teacher Ratio	67				60	15.98
F								
	1	Class Size Sept. 1979	67					12.9
F	1	Kindergarten	74				25	18.8
F	1	Primary (1-3)	74				25	22.0
F	1	Intermediate (4-7)	74				25	5.8
F	2	Special Classes - Elementary	74				25	19.8
F	1	Elementary total	74				25	5.2
F	2	Special Classes - Secondary	74				25	18.7
F	1	Secondary total	74				25	0.8
F	1	Kindergarten Classes over 20 (%)	68				25	0.8
F	1	Primary Classes over 25 (%)	73				25	0.0
F	1	Intermediate Classes over 30 (%)	71				25	0.0
F	2	Special Classes over 10 (Total) (%)	51				25	0.0
F	2	Elementary Class size Violations (%)	74				25	2.8
F	2	Secondary Classes over 30 (%)	55				25	2.0
G								
	1	Specialized School Services Sept. 1979						
G	1	Elementary Administrators per 1000 Pupils	37				25	4.6
G	1	Counselors per 1000 Pupils	11				25	10.9
G	1	Librarians per 1000 Pupils	44				25	2.8
G	2	Unassigned Time (%)	20				25	3.9
G	1	Secondary Administrators per 1000 Pupils	89				25	5.3
G	1	Counselors per 1000 Pupils	34				25	3.6
G	1	Librarians per 1000 Pupils	45				25	2.3
G	2	Unassigned Time (%)	62				25	11.4
J								
	1	Special Needs Indicators June 1979						
J	1	Elementary School Dropouts (%)	26				25	0.1
J	1	Secondary School Dropouts (%)	18				25	5.8
H								
	1	Socio-Economic Indicators						
H	1	Community Educational Level	51				25	36.5
H	1	Occupational Status	38				25	18.3
H	1	Family Income	48				25	33.6
H								
	2	Special Needs Indicators June 1979						
H	2	Native Indian Families (%)	78	11.4	5.8	1.4	0.5	0.3
H	2	Non-English Speaking Families (%)	78	12.1	8.3	3.5	4.3	2.8
H	3	Mother Tongue Not English	78	72.8	18.8	14.0	11.7	10.0
H	3	Population 5-19 years	34	34.0	31.8	28.6	27.4	24.5
H	4	Children in Single Parent Families	16	14.5	12.5	10.5	9.4	8.0

Data last date: June 1, September 1979

THE PERCENTILES

A percentile indicates the percentage of schools BELOW a certain score or value. For example, the 75th percentile for Teacher Salary Cost per Pupil is \$1,057. This means 75% of districts scored less than \$1,057. For measures such as student-teacher ratio and class size, the percentile shows the percentage of districts ABOVE a certain score or value. For example, the 50th percentile for District-Wide Pupil/Teacher Ratio is 17.15. This means 50% of districts are above a student-teacher ratio of 17.15.



Source: British Columbia Teachers Federation, Learning and Working Conditions Committee, 1980-81.

of one hundred to two hundred and seventy-five were asked to generate ten names per school, those with attendance of two hundred and seventy-six to five hundred were asked to generate fifteen names per school. (No elementary school had an attendance of over five hundred.) Secondary schools were asked to generate twenty names per school. The total number of names generated equaled four hundred and forty. Due to a school board office survey to be run after this researcher's survey, the potential sample number had to be limited to 400 names. Forty names were therefore randomly dropped from the list to meet the required number of 400.

It was hoped that by including both elementary and secondary schools a wider age, education and socio-economic range of parents would be provided thereby creating a more balanced representation for the study.

The actual sample from returned surveys was 215.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was modelled after a questionnaire developed by Sloan (1973) for use in her study in the Toledo Public School District in Ohio, U.S.A. in 1973. For purposes of clarification, it is necessary to describe Sloan's survey and note the comparisons and changes made for this study's questionnaire.

This section will be divided into two parts; the first dealing with Sloan's study and the second dealing with the changes and adaptations made to Sloan's study which were

necessary to properly utilize the survey for the school district in question in this study.

Sloan's Survey

Sloan's survey was administered in one elementary school of the Toledo Public School District in Ohio, U.S.A. The school population of 398 children included kindergarten through grade six. The surveys were sent home with the children; resulting in a total of 370 being sent as several students were absent on the day the survey was distributed. The survey (see Appendix A) was limited to two pages and divided into five sets of instructions based on three lists.

Question 1 requested parents to mark all the ways in which they learned about the school. Twelve communication channel choices were provided with a space for respondents to write in their own choice.

Question 2 used the same list and requested respondents to mark the three communication channels they considered the best for learning about the school.

Question 3 focussed on the home to school communication process with respondents indicating with a + any methods which they felt were very effective and by marking with an 0 the one method they felt was least effective. Six choices were provided with a space for additional choices if needed.

Question 4 requested parents to indicate whether:

1. they wanted to be informed,
2. they wanted to participate in making decisions, or

3. that they preferred no involvement at all, on thirteen school based issues. A place was provided for them to indicate any additional choices they might have had.

Demographic Information for the survey was categorized under:

1. mother; father; and mother and father,
2. and also an indication of whether the child was in kindergarten, Grade 1 to 3, or Grades 4 to 6.

Finally, a section for comments and suggestions was included on the survey.

This Study's Survey

For this survey (see Appendix B) several changes were made to accomodate:

1. the wider scope of respondents to be surveyed, that is both elementary and secondary parents,
2. differences between Sloan's school district which is in the U.S.A. and the school district for this study.

Specific changes included the following:

Question 1

It was felt that question 1 in Sloan's study did not include enough information sources from which parents could choose. Through input from other teachers, parents, etc. the list was expanded. To aid in narrowing the focus on which information sources were used most frequently, parents were asked to check off only seven sources as opposed to Sloan's instructions to check off all of the ways the respondent might learn about the school.

Question 2

Sloan's study required respondents (using the list given them in question 1) to mark an asterisk next to the three ways they believed were the best to learn about the school. To again focus more clearly on these choices this study required parents to use the list in question 1, but to arrange their choices in order from most important to those of lesser importance (with a reminder to not limit their responses to the same ones they had made in question 1).

Question 3

The most effective and least effective methods for parents to communicate with the school were combined in question three through use of a sliding scale from 1 to 4 (with 1 being very effective to 4 being very ineffective) for each of the twelve items listed. It was felt that choosing either very effective or very ineffective as in Sloan's questions did not provide for a wide enough range of feeling for each of the issues and that further clarification might be derived through use of the sliding scale.

Question 4

Three additions were made to the list of issues in this question for this study. They were: 1) scholarships and awards, 2) athletic programs/team travel, and 3) graduation exercises and activities. All these issues related more specifically to secondary schools which were included in this study but not Sloan's. The categories under which parents expressed their desired level of involvement on each issue

were expanded to follow Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation and School Policy Formation. This provided for six categories:

1. no involvement desired,
2. would like to be informed,
3. would like to express an opinion through a poll or survey,
4. would like to make suggestions in a meeting,
5. would like to be part of a school and/or community committee which makes decisions on the matter,
6. would like to be a part of a parent committee which makes all final decisions on the matter;

compared to three on the original Sloan survey.

Demographic Information (Question 5, 6 & 7)

This section was expanded to include information from respondents regarding their occupation and education. Question 5 included not only the respondent categories of father; mother; and father and mother; but also that of guardian(s).

Question 6 listed six occupation levels with three category choices of father, mother and guardian. Question 7 listed six levels of education again with the three category choices of father, mother and guardian. It was hoped an analysis of the effect of education and/or occupation on the desire for or level of involvement in school-based issues might be noted through the breakdown of choices into the three categories of father, mother and guardian.

The adapted and revised questionnaire (see Appendix B) contained the seven questions in five parts:

- 1) a letter of introduction,
- 2) information sources from which parents learn about their son/daughter's school, and the five most important sources (in order of importance) for them to learn about the school,
- 3) ways in which parents communicate with the school and their relative effectiveness as the parent(s) perceive them,
- 4) the extent of parents preferred involvement with sixteen issues important to schools,
- 5) demographic segment to determine the parent(s) sex, education and occupation.

The adapted and revised survey was given to a School-Community Advisory group comprising 25 parent members to check for errors, ease of understanding, etc. Some minor changes in wording were made to facilitate completion of the questionnaire by the intended respondents.

Data Collection

With the necessary changes made, the survey was ready for distribution to the 400 randomly selected parent homes.

To reduce costs the questionnaire was reduced to a fourteen centimeter by twenty-one centimeter size, approximately the same size as some school report cards.

Each parent was mailed a package which contained:

- 1) a copy of the questionnaire,
- 2) a postage-paid business reply envelope in which to return the completed questionnaire,

3) a check slip.

The check slip (see Appendix C) was to be completed by the parent(s) with their name, address, and child's school. After they had mailed their questionnaire, they were asked to have their son/daughter return the check slip to the school. The researcher picked these up as they were returned to the schools and used them to ascertain who had mailed their questionnaires. It was hoped the check slip would help to maximize the number of returns through more direct contact with the school as opposed to contact only with the researcher. The surveys themselves were mailed by business reply and therefore were held at the Post Office until the researcher was notified and then picked them up.

In addition, one week after the surveys were mailed every home receiving a package was called to ensure they had in fact received it. At this time the importance of the survey was stressed and in turn questions could be asked regarding any problems the parent(s) might have with the completion of the questionnaire. Because of the rural nature of the school district the questionnaires could not be hand delivered without great expense and time therefore the phone calls provided a necessary personal note which it was hoped would result in a greater number of returns.

Surveys Returned

A total of 215 parent homes responded to the survey out of a possible 400. This gave a return percentage of 53.75.

Of the 215 respondents (see Table 1) 30 were fathers, 142 were mothers, 42 were father and mother together, 1 was undesignated, and none were guardians.

Mothers completed more than four times the number of surveys that fathers completed.

Taking into consideration the type of survey used in study, the return percentage is fairly high, perhaps as a result of the phone calls made to each home after the survey package was mailed. Personal contact may be a factor here.

More mothers than fathers completed the surveys perhaps due to the nature of the family structure or to more mothers being at home during the day to attend to children and the issues surrounding them.

Sloan (1973) also found more mothers than fathers completed her survey. Her results indicate 75 percent of the returns were from mothers. This study reveals 66 percent of returns were from mothers. Mothers were also represented in the father/mother category and therefore the percentage is actually higher than the 66 indicated.

It is interesting to note that no guardians completed the survey although the master list indicated several students had guardians. It would appear these people did not complete the survey, for some unknown reason.

Coding of the Data

The data were coded in as simple a manner as possible. Where there were already pre-coded numbers for the responses within the question, the numbers circled by the respondent were

TABLE 1
Completed Surveys Categorized by Respondents

Parent	Number	Percentage
Father	30	14
Mother	142	66
Father and Mother	42	19.53
Guardians	0	-
Unclassified	1	0.47
Totals	215	100

used as the code numbers. (see Question 3, Appendix B). In questions where the respondent had an option in his/her response, the responses were coded from 1 through to 6 (see Question 4, Appendix B). In question 1 the items checked by the respondent were coded using the actual number of the question as the code number, (see Question 1, Appendix B). Questions 1 and 2 were placed on one computer card and questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 on another card. This was done to accomodate the coding of Question 2 where the actual number chosen was used as the coded number for each of the five choices. (See Question 2, Appendix B). As well, the demographic data were coded in a simple manner. In the case of sex, the father was coded 1, the mother was coded 2 and the father and mother together were coded 3, the occupation of the respondent(s) were coded 1 to 6 with 1 the code for "business and professional" and 6 the code for "undesignated", the level of education was also coded 1 to 6 with 1 the code for "elementary school" education through to 6 for "college graduate".

Incomplete Questionnaires

Some questionnaires were not entirely completed and therefore such questions were not coded. Blanks were left on the coding sheets if no response was given to a certain question with specific instructions given to the computer operator to adjust the "N" whenever a response was omitted.

Computer Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to obtain frequency distribution on all questions. Mean

and standard deviations were obtained on questions 3 and 4. The respondents were then grouped by father, mother, and father and mother together to facilitate the following analysis:

1. The effect of occupation or level of education on respondents choices,
2. frequency of choices by each group for each question.

Summary

This chapter has dealt with the data requirements and the school district setting for the study.

The population, potential, and actual samples for the survey have been described.

A discussion of the questionnaire and its adaptation from Sloan (1973) have been detailed.

The data collection and survey returns have been discussed. Coding of the data, incomplete questionnaires and the computer analysis for the study have been cited.

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS
AND
DISCUSSION

The survey results were compiled and listed through use of the computer as outlined in Chapter three. The five sub-problems of the study as described in Chapter one were used to analyze the data results. This chapter has been set out to describe the analyze of each of the sub-problems first with the findings on the problem followed by a discussion of those findings.

Analysis of the most frequent methods of communication used by schools

Sub-Problem 1.0

What are the most frequent ways in which schools communicate with parents?

Findings.

The category receiving the greatest number of overall responses as being most frequently used to communicate information to the home was that of "what my son/daughter tells me." with 192 (89.3%) respondents choosing it. (See Table 2). The second most frequently chosen response (with 173 (80.4%) respondents choosing it) was that of "my son/daughter's report card: a formal method of communication. The school newsletter ranked third as an information source used by schools, while scheduled parent-teacher conferences ranked fourth at 135 (62.7%)

TABLE 2
Most Frequent Information Sources From Which Parents^a
Learn about Their Child/Children's School

Information Source	Number of Times Cited by Parent Respondents	Percentage of Times Cited
What my son/daughter tells me	192	89.3
My son/daughter's report card	173	80.4
The school's newsletter	165	76.7
Scheduled Parent-Teacher Conferences	135	62.7
Personal visits to the school	123	57.2
Teacher notes and/or phone calls	112	52.0
Conversations with adult friends and/or Neighbours	103	47.9
"Meet-the-Teacher" nights	91	42.3
School Open House	76	35.3
Local Newspaper	67	31.1
Notes or phone calls you make to the school	53	24.6
Personal friendships with principal, teachers, trustees, or other educational staff	44	20.5
School athletic activities	34	15.8
What neighbour's sons/daughters tell me	32	14.8
Education-in-Action Week	19	8.8
Radio news or talk shows	14	6.5
Guided tours of the school	9	4.2
Other staff or people at school or those who deal with the school	8	3.7
Other members of the community not mentioned above	8	3.7
Other (please specify)	8	3.7

a.n = 215

responses. Personal visits to the school was the fifth most frequent method of communication with the home. Of the top ten most frequently chosen methods, seven were formal methods of communication requiring little or no parental input into the communication process.

With slight variations in ranking these same five sources appear as the choices cited by each of Father, Mother and Father/Mother groups, (see Table 3) with more than fifty percent of respondents choosing them.

Discussion.

The category of "What my son/daughter tells me" can be both an informal and formal method of communication. It is formal when children carry home with them verbal or written messages which the school wishes to transmit to the home and is informal when students carry home information they have assimilated through the school day and which may not necessarily be messages which the school per se would like transmitted home. As the child is a source of direct contact with the school for parents it would seem to follow that what the child discusses at home, about the school, provides a frequent method of communication for parents in this school district. Saxe (1975) notes:

"Although informal conversation with children, friends, and neighbours is the most readily available source of information about schools, it is not noted for its accuracy" (p. 167 - 168).

It is interesting to note that this information source ranked second in Sloan's (1973) study (see Figure 5) behind the number one chosen school newsletter. Note however that

TABLE 3
Most Frequent Information Sources about School:
A Comparison of the Perceptions of Father, Mother,
and Father/Mother Respondents

Information Source	Respondent Group								
	Father ^a (Rank, n and 1 citing Information source)		Mother ^b (Rank, n and 1 citing Information source)		Father/Mother ^c (Rank, n and 1 citing Information source)				
	n	1	Rank	n	1	Rank			
What my son/daughter tells me	28	93.3	1	125	88.0	1	39	92.8	1
My son/daughter's report card	26	86.7	2	114	80.2	2	33	78.5	3
The school's newsletter	22	73.3	3	108	76.0	3	35	83.3	2
Scheduled parent-teacher conferences	15	50.0	5	92	64.7	4	28	66.7	5
Personal visits to the school	16	53.3	4	77	54.2	5	30	71.4	4
Teacher notes and/or phone calls	15	50.0	5	76	53.5	6	21	50.0	6
Conversations with adult friends and/or neighbours	9	30.0	7	76	53.5	6	18	42.8	8
"Meet-the-teacher" nights	15	50.0	5	57	40.1	7	19	45.2	7
School Open House	16	53.3	4	44	30.9	8	16	38.1	9
Local Newspapers	12	40.0	6	43	30.2	9	12	28.5	10
Notes or phone calls you make to the school	6	20.0	8	36	25.3	10	11	26.2	11
Personal friendships with principal, trustees, or other educational staff	9	30.0	7	26	18.3	11	9	21.4	12
School athletic activities	5	16.7	9	24	16.9	12	5	11.9	14
What neighbour's sons/daughters tell me	5	16.7	9	20	14.1	13	7	16.7	13
Education-in-Action week	5	16.7	9	11	7.7	14	3	7.1	16
Radio news or talk shows	3	10.0	10	8	5.6	15	3	7.1	16
Guided tours of the school	-	-		5	3.5	16	4	9.5	15
Other staff or people at school or those who deal with the school	-	-		4	2.8	17	4	9.5	15
Other members of the community not mentioned above	2	6.7	11	5	3.5	16	1	2.4	18
Other (please specify)	1	3.3	12	5	3.5	16	2	4.8	17

a. Father = 30

b. Mother = 142

c. Father/Mother = 42

FIGURE 5

Ways Parents Learn About the School: Numbers and Percentage Distribution of Total Responses

Communication channels	Number of responses	Mother response percentages	Father response percentages	Mother and father response percentages	Unclassified response percentages	Percentage totals
My child tells me	272	10.3	1.0	2.3	.6	14.2
Neighbor children tell me	57	2.1	.3	.5	.2	3.1
Conversations with adult friends and neighbors	160	6.4	.5	1.0	.4	8.3
School newsletter (Beacon)	230	10.5	1.2	2.2	.6	14.5
Classroom newsletter	104	4.5	.3	.4	.1	5.3
Teacher notes or phone calls	129	5.0	.7	.7	.2	6.6
Parent teacher conferences	237	9.2	.8	1.9	.2	12.1
Report cards	196	7.2	1.0	1.6	.3	10.1
Notes or calls to school	101	4.2	.3	.5	.2	5.2
Personal visits to school	126	5.0	.3	1.0	.3	6.6
Classroom visits or observations	111	4.4	.3	.7	.2	5.6
P.T.A. meetings	151	5.4	.8	1.3	.4	7.9
Other	7	.3	.1	.1	.1	.5
Totals	1931	74.5	7.6	14.1	3.8	100.0

Source: B. Sloan, School-Home Communication, (An Educational Specialist Paper, 1973), p. 37.

the question asked for this study was not to identify the "best" method, (as Sloan's study did) but the most frequent method of communication as parents perceive it. This point applies to all the following gross comparisons made between this question and Sloan's.

It would appear from both this study and Sloan's (1973) that the school newspaper is perceived by parents as a frequent source of information although it ranked third in this study to first in Sloan's.

Report cards, chosen as the second most frequent communication channel in this report were fourth most frequent in the Sloan study. This may be attributable to the type of report card used. The school district surveyed uses an elementary report in several schools which has a category for parental input and comments onto the returned portion of the report card. This may reflect well in parents' minds and stand out as a communication channel which is frequently available to them.

Parent-teacher conferences and personal visits to the school were chosen fourth and fifth. Sloan's study finds them at third and seventh respectively. This may be due to the way the question was asked or to the nature of the community. The community in which this study was conducted is fairly close knit and religious and therefore this may have an effect on the importance placed on parent-teacher conferences and personal visits. In addition, the philosophy of the

schools towards a more "open" or "closed" boundary position may be reflected in the parental choices on these items for this study.

Finally it would appear that the choices on the five most frequent information sources varies little among the three parent groups of Father, Mother, and Father/Mother. All the groups seem to feel these are frequent information sources used by schools.

Analysis of the most important sources of information for parents to learn about the school.

Sub-Problem 2.0

What are the most important sources of information from which parents learn about the school?

Findings.

The most important source of information for parents to learn about the school was through "what my son/daughter tells me" which had an overall importance mean of 3.55. (See Table 4.) This places that method of communication as the number one choice ahead of the school newsletter with an overall importance mean of 3.32. "My son/daughter's report card" was the third choice under most important information source with an overall importance mean of 3.20. "Scheduled Parent-Teacher Conferences" and "Personal Friendships with Principal, Teachers, etc." were the respondents fourth and fifth overall important choices.

Discussion.

It is interesting to note that the order of responses has

TABLE 4
Parents' Perceptions of Relative Importance
of Information Sources from which They Learn
About Their Child/Children's School

Information Source	Times Cited as					Overall Importance $\bar{x}$	Rank
	Most Important	2nd Most Important	3rd Most Important	4th Most Important	5th Most Important		
What my son/daughter tells me	58	41	26	22	21	3.55	1
The school's newsletter	36	34	32	24	18	3.32	2
My son/daughter's report card	31	17	34	25	15	3.20	3
Scheduled Parent-Teacher Conferences	19	29	29	26	14	3.11	4
Personal friendships with Principal, teachers, etc.	8	10	4	9	7	3.08	5
Teacher notes and/or phone calls	15	16	14	14	17	2.97	6
Personal visits to school	18	21	21	20	25	2.88	7
School Open House	7	10	9	14	9	2.84	8
Guided tours of school	1	1	1	2	1	2.83	9
"Meet-the-teacher" nights	10	18	13	18	18	2.79	10
What neighbour's sons/daughters tell me	2	1	1	4	2	2.70	11
Notes or phone calls you make to the school	2	3	6	3	8	2.45	12
Education-in-Action	-	-	3	1	1	2.40	13
Conversations with adult friends and/or neighbours	2	5	6	12	20	2.04	14
Other members of the community not mentioned above	-	-	1	-	1	2.00	15
Local newspapers	1	3	7	9	17	1.97	16
School athletic activities	-	1	2	1	7	1.73	17
Other staff or people at school or who deal with the school	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Radio news or talk shows	-	-	-	3	2	1.60	18
Other	-	-	-	1	4	1.20	19
	3	2	3	1	-	3.78C	-

a. $n = 215$

b. Mean is calculated by assigning a value of 5 to Most Important; Value of 1 to 5th Most Important. Each value is multiplied by the number of times cited, divided by total citations and the mean is calculated.

c. Other - this category is not included in the ranking.

changed little from "most frequent" to "most important" method of communication, with the exception of "personal friendships" replacing "personal visits". "The school newsletter" and "my son/daughter's report card" have switched to number two and number three choices respectively from number three and number two choices under "most frequent" communication channel.

It would appear that the top five choices in both the "most frequent" and "most important" sources of information for parents to learn about their son/daughter's school are the same five choices with only the one above-mentioned change in sources. Perhaps then the schools may be providing the channels for communication which parents feel are the best or most important ones to satisfy their present needs. What may however be more likely is that parents have chosen the options which they feel the schools would prefer they chose. Perhaps parents feel these are the most traditional or accepted methods and therefore chose these communication methods for these values.

In Sloan's study (again remember however, the questions were not worded the same from her study to this) the school's newsletter appears as the first choice under both "most frequent" and "most important" methods of communication (see Figure 6). "What my child tells me" falls fourth in comparison to number one in this study. It would seem the close-knit and religious nature of the community in this study has perhaps had an effect on the value judgements and therefore the placement of this information source.

FIGURE 6
Ways of Learning About The School Perceived Best By Parents:
Numbers and Percentage Distribution of Total Responses

Communication channels	Number of responses	Mother response percentages	Father response percentages	Mother and father response percentages	Unclassified response percentages	Percentage totals
My child tells me	58	6.0	1.0	1.0	.3	8.3
Neighbor children tell me	0					
Conversations with adult friends and neighbors	9	1.0				1.3
School newsletter (Beacon)	202	21.4	2.0	4.1	1.3	28.8
Classroom newsletter	34	4.0	.1	.6	.1	4.8
Teacher notes or phone calls	45	4.4	1.2	.7	.1	6.4
Parent teacher conferences	164	17.2	1.7	4.1	.3	23.3
Report cards	24	2.1	.5	.4	.5	3.5
Notes or calls to school	18	2.2		.1	.2	2.5
Personal visits to school	32	3.3	.1	.9	.3	4.6
Classroom visits or observation	41	4.0	.4	1.3	.1	5.8
P.T.A. Meetings	73	6.8	.9	2.4	.4	10.5
Other	2	.1			.1	.2
Totals	702	72.5	8.2	15.6	3.7	100.0

Source: B. Sloan, School-Home Communication, (An Educational Specialist Paper, 1973), p. 38.

"Parent-Teacher conferences" are the second choice by parents in Sloan's study and the fourth in this study. This may be indicative of the focus of the school district on different communication channels which then appears in the parental choices on these items. The tone of the community may also provide clues as to why one category may be ranked higher by the parents in Sloan's study versus this study.

The School's newsletter being chosen as the second most important method of communication in this study may be tied to the fact that it is a common method used by schools to relate to the home. Saxe (1975) states:

"The common media for communications between school and home seem to be newspapers or newsletter, conferences, notes and phone calls" (p. 167).

Something like a newsletter which appears at the home several times during the year seems to be a communication channel parents remember and it would seem from this study, find as an important source of information about the school.

Finally it is interesting to speculate on the reasons behind parents' choices resulting in "Personal Friendships" replacing "Personal Visits" in the top five ranking for this question. From residing in the community the author has noted that this is a very close-knit community. Social and religious activities are closely aligned giving community members the opportunity to discuss business, political, social and educational matters with each other on a frequent basis. This may account for the learning of information about the school through personal friendships developed with principals, teachers, etc.

Analysis of the most effective methods for parents to communicate with the school.

Sub-Problem 3.0

What are the most effective ways for parents to communicate with the school?

Findings.

"Direct approach" with a mean of 3.64 and a standard deviation of 0.80 proved to be the most effective method for parents to communicate with the school (see Table 5). "Parent-Teacher conferences" with a mean of 3.20 and a standard deviation of 0.87 was the second most effective method as chosen by the parents. With a mean of 2.84 and a standard deviation of 1.09, "Work as a school volunteer" appeared as the third choice. "Messages sent with your son/daughter to the school" had a mean of 2.70 and a standard deviation of 0.94 and was the fourth choice for most effective method of parents communicating with the school. Most of the remaining choices had means and standard deviations which provided little or no significance as to the overall effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the communication channel. However, "letters to the editor" with a mean of 1.63 and a standard deviation of 0.82 and "open-line radio shows" with a mean of 1.76 and a standard deviation of 0.89 were perceived by parents as very ineffective communication channels to the school.

Discussion.

It would appear that parents who want an effective method of communication with the school use the direct approach by

TABLE 5
Parents' Perceptions of Relative Effectiveness
of Home to School Communication Channels

Communication Channel	Very Effective n	Effective n	Ineffective n	Very Ineffective n	$\bar{x}$	SD	Rank
Direct approach by phone or in person to school	158	33	9	11	3.64	0.80	1
Parent-Teacher Conferences	116	64	17	13	3.20	0.87	2
Work as a school volunteer	72	55	38	33	2.84	1.09	3
Messages sent with your son/daughter to the school	43	87	51	27	2.70	0.94	4
Phone calls, notes or in person to school board office or trustees	44	66	46	46	2.54	1.07	5
Parent-Interest Groups	23	79	75	26	2.49	0.86	6
P.T.A. or similar group	39	62	56	44	2.48	1.04	7
The information network (e.g. social meeting with teacher and/or school district officials)	28	63	74	38	2.40	0.95	8
Surveys issued by school	21	68	81	32	2.39	0.88	9
Participation in more formal activities such as fund-raising, graduation, plays, etc. organized by the school	23	65	74	40	2.35	0.93	10
Other (Please specify)	4	3	-	8	1.80	1.37	11
Open-line radio shows	8	36	57	30	1.76	0.89	12
Letters to the editor	9	17	66	108	1.63	0.82	13

a. $n = 215$

b. Very Effective = 4; Effective = 3; etc.

phone or in person. The idea of personal contact seems to be necessary for effective communication to take place. This is further emphasized by the other remaining choices made by the parents. "Parent-Teacher conferences", "messages sent with your son/daughter to the school", and "work as a volunteer" all have a personal element to them which would seem to be perceived by parents as essential to effective communication.

Sloan's study (1973) found "Parent-Teacher conferences", "direct approach by phone", and P.T.A." (in that order) as the most effective way of parents communicating with the school. (See Figure 7). Again, although the question itself and the number of choices available to the respondents differ from Sloan's study to this, all three choices made by parents on Sloan's study and this have a personal element to them suggesting it as a necessary part of an effective communication from parents to the school. Saxe (1975) states:

"One-to-one communication is better than one-group communication and oral communication in person is better than printed forms or surveys" (p. 180).

The two methods "open-line radio" and "letters to the editor" are perceived by parents as the least effective for communicating with the school are both indirect and outside of the school framework per se. They do not provide for direct personal contact with the school and therefore do not satisfy the personal element need which would seem to be present in effective communications from the home to the school.

FIGURE 7
Home-School Communication Channels Considered Very
Effective By Parents: Numbers and Percentage
Distribution of Total Responses

Communication channels	Number of responses	Mother response percentages	Father response percentages	Mother and father response percentages		Unclassified response percentages	Percentage totals
				percentages	percentages		
Direct approach	227	19.3	2.1	4.0	1.1		26.5
Parent teacher conferences	261	22.0	2.4	5.1	.9		30.4
Periodically scheduled open forum	70	5.9	1.1	1.1	.2		1.3
P.T.A. Representative parent council	167	13.9	1.4	3.7	.5		19.5
Surveys issued by school	35	2.7	.3	1.0			5.0
Other	92	7.8	.8	1.6	.1		10.3
	5			.4	.6		1.0
Totals	857	71.6	8.1	16.9	3.4		100.0

Source: B. Sloan, School-Home Communication, (An Educational Specialist Paper, 1973), p. 43.

Analysis of the involvement parents want in making
school-based decisions.

Sub-Problem 4.0

To what extent do parents want involvement in making
school based decisions?

Findings.

The means indicate that the majority of the respondents fall between the "be informed" and "express opinion" categories in their choices on this question. (See Table 6). The standard deviations reveal that the respondents main choices range from "no involvement" to "making suggestions at a meeting".

Means also indicate that parents' desire some involvement in most of the listed issues with "pupil disciplinary policies", "safety concerns", "learning problems of my son/daughter", "subjects taught", "dress code", and "new and special programs" being ranked as issues they would probably care to express opinions on. The remaining issues seem to be ones on which being informed is the highest level of involvement desired by these parents.

Less than ten percent of the parent respondents chose the option of complete citizen power by marking the "parent group to make all final decisions" category.

Discussion.

Sloan (1973); Saxe (1975); and others discuss that parents are almost always interested and concerned about issues which relate to their child. This would perhaps explain the frequent

TABLE 6
Parents' Perceptions of Desired Involvement
In School Decisions

Decision Issue	No Involvement	Be Informed	Express Opinion	Make Suggestions	Part of a Committee to Make all Final Decisions	$\bar{x}$	SD	Rank
Pupil Disciplinary Policies & Procedures	19	69	58	40	16	2.95	1.24	1
Safety Concerns	14	81	49	36	19	2.92	1.21	2
Learning problems of my son/daughter	7	115	13	50	11	2.88	1.28	3
Subjects taught	21	90	43	27	24	2.74	1.19	4
Dress Code	42	57	70	21	10	2.63	1.26	5
New or Special Problems	30	79	50	24	13	2.62	1.19	6
Field Trips	23	114	30	21	15	2.54	1.19	7
Size of class	45	67	55	20	16	2.54	1.26	7
Graduation Exercises etc.	35	91	28	22	15	2.51	1.27	8
Homework	31	106	31	27	11	2.48	1.14	9
Hours of school day	49	63	65	16	9	2.44	1.17	10
Lunch Program	57	64	37	25	11	2.43	1.33	11
Athletic Program	39	98	28	22	10	2.37	1.16	12
Pupil Evaluation	31	118	26	24	9	2.36	1.04	13
Purchase of major school items	62	73	40	21	12	2.28	1.19	14
Scholarships & Awards	76	97	19	11	4	1.89	0.96	15
Other (please specify)	-	-	-	2	5	4.88	0.64	-

a. n = 215

b. Number of Parent Group = 6; etc.

choices by parents under the "informed" and "express opinion" categories for this question. As long as they are informed on issues relating to their child or can express an opinion on an issue, it would seem to be acceptable to the majority of parents in this survey.

Most parents seem to desire lower levels of involvement on the issues presented to them in this study. Following from this, parents seem to be content at levels of participation for which Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation and School Policy Formation would deem 'token representation'. As mentioned earlier however, practices at lower levels of the ladder are not necessarily assessed as being less useful to citizens or parents. At this time and for these issues the parents of this community would seem to feel that these lower levels of involvement are all that are necessary.

Less than ten percent of the respondents chose "parent group to make all final decisions" as their response to the sixteen issues. This may have several meanings:

1. Perhaps parents do not feel qualified or capable, or that it is desirable for a parent committee to make all final decisions on these matters.
2. Perhaps parents are satisfied with the methods of communicating their feelings to the school, such as opinion polls, suggestions at meetings, or just being informed.
3. Perhaps parents are, at present on these issues at least, content at the levels of involvement they have indicated.

They might however reverse their position if the activity or issue changed significantly.

4. Perhaps the issues chosen are ones which do not incite parents to become highly involved.
5. Perhaps some of the issues do not relate directly enough to the effect they have on the parents' child and therefore parents do not see them as issues which require a high degree of involvement on their part.
6. Perhaps parents are not ready at this time to take on the responsibility of complete control of education.

One parent commented on the survey that:

"I regard numbers five and six to be synonymous with membership on the school board to which I do not currently aspire - hence no replies in these categories."

It may be that parents' concepts of a school, community or parent committee are linked with the idea of running for a political position or being a part of a political structure of which they desire no part. Perhaps as Saxe (1975) notes it may relate to the fact:

"That parents ... were willing to trust educators with the technical aspects of education but showed concern about activities relating to their own child" (p. 178).

Parents choosing involvement levels at the lower end of the ladder are perhaps either unsure or unwilling to become involved or feel the system is running well and until it doesn't they will not become involved.

Two parents commenting on the bottom section under Question four said:

"Due to lack of education myself, I hesitate to offer my services to the school.... feeling inadequate."

and

"Please don't interpret my lack of commitment or involvement as lack of concern for my child. I am a naturally reticent person."

A variety of reasons therefore may have affected parents in choosing levels of involvement for the sixteen decision issues.

On the other hand, Saxe (1975) notes:

"It is good practise for educators to be certain that citizens receive information about issues that are of importance to them. Failure to do this will seriously endanger school-community relations. The other extreme - saturating citizens with information about which they care little -- although not as harmful, should also be avoided. For these reasons educators will need to be aware of the concerns of the community" (p. 177).

From information such as was generated through question four of this survey, educators may be able to reduce "saturation of parents" through over use or misuse of information sent to the home. Parents through their choices may be indicating areas where saturation could occur if communication became too intense on any one of the listed issues.

At present it would appear that parents care only to be informed or at most express an opinion on the sixteen issues (as a general rule) and that they do not desire higher levels of involvement as earlier outlined through Arnstein's Ladder. Again, however, this could change with a change in the issues presented to parents. An example of this was clearly illustrated in September of 1982 due to government budget cuts which resulted in 66 teacher termination notices being sent out in

this district. Public support from parents was overwhelming, with 2000 people attending a public meeting to air their views on the issue. It would seem that cuts in educational funding which result in direct reduction of teachers and supplies is an issue which parents find intolerable. The high degree of involvement of parents throughout this time resulted in the school board rescinding the termination notices. Therefore an issue of high priority for the parents of this school district would appear to be adequate funding to ensure the best quality of education for their children. This issue was not one of the sixteen listed under question four of this survey, and therefore indicates that a change in issue(s) could result in a change on the part of parents need or desire for involvement.

Analysis of the level of education and/or occupation in the work force on parent involvement in school issues.

Sub-Problem 5.0

To what extent does the level of education and/or occupation in the work force have on the amount of participation parents may want in school issues?

Findings.

Occupation: Father

Of the 30 fathers responding to the survey 19 listed Business and Professional as their occupation. (See Table 7). The five top ranked decision issues for Sub-Problem 4.0: Pupil Disciplinary Policies and Procedure, Safety Concerns, Learning Problems of Son/Daughter, Subject Taught, and Dress Code, were

TABLE 7
Breakdown of Occupation of Respondents

Occupation	Father	Mother
Business & Professional	19	37
Clerical	1	25
Skilled Labour	7	9
Unskilled Labour	1	7
Non-Labour Force	-	38
Undesignated	2	23
Totals	30	139 ^a

a. Three mothers did not respond to this question.

used to delineate the desired involvement choices made by the fathers. (See Table 8).

By using a 20% decision rule to narrow the focus on the category choices, one can see that most of the choices made by the fathers were in the "be informed" and "make suggestions" columns. Two exceptions can be noted, one under Safety Concerns with 21% choosing the category of "Part of a committee" and 42% choosing the category of "Express Opinion" for dress code.

Discussion.

It would appear that fathers' choices for involvement on these five decision issues are concentrated on the categories of "be informed" and "make suggestions" with the majority of the fathers choosing the former category. Under "parent committee" a major minority of this father group appear to desire a greater degree of involvement with safety concerns, perhaps a protective reaction towards one's own child.

Being informed, however seems to be the main concern for these Business and Professional Fathers. Having the opportunity to make suggestions in a meeting would seem to be important to several fathers on the issues of Pupil Disciplinary Policies and Learning Problems of Son/daughter. Perhaps these fathers feel these areas relate to the educational success of their son or daughter and therefore they would like a greater degree of involvement on these issues.

It is difficult however, to determine the true significance of these two category choices due to the limited number of

TABLE 8
Business and Professional Fathers' Perceptions
of Desired Involvement in School Decisions

Decision Issue	No Involve- ment	Be Informed	Express Opinion	Make Sugg- estions	Part of a Committee	Parent Group to make all final Decisions
Pupil Disciplinary Policies & Procedures	1	7 (37%)	1	7 (37%)	2	1
Safety Concerns	0	7 (37%)	3	5 (26%)	4 (21%)	0
Learning Problems of Son/Daughter	0	9 (47%)	0	7 (37%)	1	2
Subjects Taught	1	9 (47%)	2	4 (21%)	3	0
Dress Code	2	4 (21%)	8 (42%)	2	2	1

a. $\bar{n}$ = 19

fathers responding to the survey and also the fact they were almost all Business and Professional men.

Findings.

Occupation: Mother

A total of 139 mothers responded to the question regarding their occupation. (See Table 7). Of this number nine listed skilled labour and seven listed unskilled as their occupations. Due to the relatively less significant numbers of mothers in these categories, they were removed from the analysis of this question.

For this analysis a 25% decision rule was used to determine the significant choices as made by the mothers. In addition the same five decision issues which appeared as the most frequent choices by respondents in Sub-Problem 4.0 were also used to determine if any pattern existed for mothers' choices on desired degrees of involvement by their occupation.

From the use of the 25% decision rule, it seems mothers in all the remaining occupations prefer to "be informed" as their main choice for each decision issue. (See Table 9). In all the groups "express opinion" appears as a frequent second choice for many of the listed issues. In each occupational area the category of "make suggestions" appears as a strong second choice under the issue of Learning Problem of my Son/Daughter.

Discussion.

Again as for fathers, the main response choice on all issues is that of wishing to be informed. Perhaps both fathers and

TABLE 9
Mothers' Perceptions of Desired Involvement
in School Decisions by Their Occupation^a

Decisions Issue	No Involvement	Be Informed	Express Opinion	Make Sug- estions	Part of a Committee	Parent Group to make all Final Decisions	Total Number of Respondents for each Issue
Business & Professional							
Pupil Disciplinary Policies & Proced.	1	13 (32)	10 (27)	7	5	1	37
Safety Concerns	1	18 (49)	6	7	5	0	37
Learning Problems of Son/Daughter	1	20 (56)	2	9 (25)	2	2	36
Subjects Taught	3	19 (51)	4	3	8	0	37
Dress Code	6	11 (28)	9 (25)	7	3	0	36
Clerical							
Pupil Disciplinary Policies & Proced.	0	9 (39)	7 (30)	4	3	0	23
Safety Concerns	0	9 (38)	6 (25)	6 (25)	3	0	24
Learning Problems of Son/Daughter	0	16 (67)	0	5 (21)	2	1	24
Subjects Taught	1	13 (54)	5	4	1	0	24
Dress Code	5	6	10 (42)	1	1	1	24

mothers feel that at least being informed provides them with the opportunity to make further choices as to a course of action or degree of involvement if in their opinion action is warranted. The idea of information as a way of touching base seems to be important here.

Mothers from all the occupations want the opportunity to express their opinions on many of the listed decision issues, however no distinct pattern appears which would indicate on which of the issues they might want this increase in involvement.

Fathers made more choices in the "make suggestions" category than did mothers, but for Learning Problems of my Son/Daughter both groups concentrated their responses on "be informed" and "make suggestions". It would seem that occupation does not, for this issue at least, have an effect on the type or degree of involvement as all groups feel being informed or making recommendations at a meeting are two strong choice possibilities for the afore-mentioned issue. No other significant patterns in the category choices would indicate the effect of occupation on parents choices on these decision issues other than the one of wishing to "be informed".

Findings.

Education: Father

The majority of the fathers' responding to the survey indicated they had completed college. (See Table 10). Using the same five decision issues, fathers' responses were centred

TABLE 10
Breakdown of Education of Respondents

Education	Father	Mother
Elementary School	0	4
High School Incomplete	5	31
High School Graduate	4	39
Technical, Trade or Business school or other training beyond High School	6	38
College Incomplete	0	14
College Graduate	15	15
Totals	30	141 ^a

a. One mother did not respond to this question.

on "be informed" and "make suggestions". "Express opinion" was also a strong choice for Safety Concerns and Dress code. (See Table 11).

A 20% decision rule was used to isolate the significant choices as made by the fathers on these issues.

Discussion.

As for occupation the main responses by fathers on the five issues are the categories of "be informed" and "make suggestions". Being informed merits the higher number of responses except in the case of Learning Problems of son/daughter where "making suggestions" is the first involvement choice with 53% of respondents choosing it for this issue.

It might be assumed that due to their own higher level of education, these fathers may more easily recognize or identify learning problems of their son or daughter which in turn may produce a greater degree of concern and therefore also encourage a higher level of involvement. With such a small sample, it is difficult to determine if this is indeed the case or if some other factor is influencing the respondents choice on this issue.

Safety Concerns and Dress Code also had a significant number of fathers choosing "express opinion" as the category choice. Expressing opinions on safety concerns may be a natural outgrowth of concern for the overall safety of one's child. However these two issues do not seem to have very much in common, as well, it is hard to determine from this small sample

TABLE 11
College Graduate Fathers' a Perceptions of
Desired Involvement in School Decisions

Decision Issue	No Involve- ment	Be Informed	Express Opinion	Make Sugg- estions	Part of a Committee	Parent Group To make all Final Decisions
Pupil Disciplinary Policies & Procedures	0	5 (33%)	2	5 (33%)	2	1
Safety Concerns	0	6 (40%)	3 (20%)	4 (25%)	2	0
Learning Problems of Son/Daughter	0	4 (27%)	0	8 (53%)	1	2
Subjects Taught	0	6 (40%)	3	3	3	0
Dress Code	1	3	6 (40%)	3	2	0

a. n = 15

why the fathers may be choosing the involvement level of "express opinion" on these issues.

Findings.

Education: Mother

On all five decision issues the majority of mothers chose "be informed" with "express opinion" and "make suggestions" as significant major minorities under several of the issues. (See Table 12). Again a 20% decision rule was used to narrow the focus on the choices made by these respondents.

Two patterns became apparent with the use of the 20% decision rule. These are:

1. under Learning Problems of son/daughter, "be informed" and "make suggestions" account for not less than 60% of the choices on this issue.
2. as the level of education drops, the number of choices in a category other than "be informed" begins to decline from the higher categories to that of "be informed".

Discussion.

As for fathers the main category choice remains at "be informed". Even on these higher ranked issues information seems to be the important link for communication with these parents and the school.

The pattern of category choices for Learning Problems of my son/daughter is the same as that of the fathers as related earlier. The assumption that a better level of education may relate to a greater need for involvement if learning problems

TABLE 12
Mothers' Perceptions of Desired Involvement
In school Decisions by Their Education

Decision Issue	No Involvement	Be Informed	Express Opinion	Make Suggestions	Part of a Committee	Parent Group to Make all Final Decisions	Total Number of Respondents for each Issue
College Graduate							
Pupil Disciplinary Policies & Proced.	1	4 (27%)	4 (27%)	3 (20%)	2	1	15
Safety Concerns	2	6 (40%)	3	3 (20%)	1	1	15
Learning Problems of Son/Daughter	1	7 (47%)	0	4 (27%)	1	2	15
Subject Taught	1	4 (26%)	2	3 (21%)	4 (26%)	0	14
Dress Code	2	2	7 (47%)	1	2	1	15
College Incomplete							
Pupil Disciplinary Policies & Proced.	1	3 (21%)	5 (36%)	4 (29%)	1	0	14
Safety Concerns	1	2	5 (38%)	3	1	1	13
Learning Problems of Son/Daughter	2	4 (31%)	2	4 (31%)	0	1	13
Subjects Taught	0	5 (36%)	4 (29%)	5 (36%)	0	0	14
Dress Code	3 (21%)	5 (36%)	4 (29%)	0	2	0	14
Technical or Trade School							
Pupil Disciplinary Policies & Proced.	2	11 (48%)	9 (24%)	9 (24%)	4	2	37
Safety Concerns	2	14 (38%)	9 (24%)	8 (22%)	4	0	37
Learning Problems of Son/Daughter	1	22 (61%)	1	9 (25%)	2	1	36
Subjects Taught	4	15 (39%)	9 (25%)	7	5	1	38
Dress Code	6	9 (25%)	9 (25%)	7	3	2	36

TABLE 12
(cont'd)

Decision Issue	No Involve- ment	Be Informed	Express Opinion	Make Sugg- estions	Part of a Committee	Parent Group to Make all Final Decisions	Total Number of Respondents for each Issue
High School Graduate							
Pupil Disciplinary Policies & Proced.	0	15 (14)	12 (32)	6	2	2	37
Safety Concerns	2	13 (34)	16 (42)	4	1	2	38
Learning Problems							
of Son/Daughter	0	22 (58)	3	9 (24)	2	2	38
Subjects Taught	5	20 (51)	7	3	4	0	39
Dress Code	7	10 (26)	17 (44)	3	1	1	39
High School Incomplete							
Pupil Disciplinary Policies & Proced.	4	15 (50)	8 (27)	2	1	0	30
Safety Concerns	1	16 (53)	5	4	4	0	30
Learning Problems							
of Son/Daughter	2	20 (65)	0	7 (23)	1	1	30
Subjects Taught	3	14 (50)	7 (25)	2	2	0	28
Dress Code	5	16 (52)	9 (29)	1	0	0	31

a. College Graduate, College Incomplete, Technical or Trade school, High School Graduate,
High School Incomplete.

occur does not apply here. Perhaps the general societal concern for students to succeed at school is reflected through the mothers' choices here. A lack of success at school due to learning problems may encourage a greater degree of involvement on the part of the mother to ensure her son/daughter's ultimate success at school.

The second pattern, that of a decline in choices at the higher category levels with a lowering in education level may be a result of mothers with less education feeling that:

1. they haven't the background or knowledge to compete with teachers,
2. they are uncertain as to what a higher level of involvement may incur,
3. the need to have their child succeed in school is no greater than the need they felt to complete school,
4. or that contact with the school would be a bother, their reception by education officials unknown, or that the school would handle any problems as they arose.

Lindsay (1968) in her study on school and community relates:

"The reason teachers gave ...with greatest frequency was that the parents' diffidence or feelings of awe were responsible for their not coming up to the school, and they regarded these as being founded on the parents' unfamiliarity with education, their difficulty in self-expression, and their awareness of socio-economic difference" (p. 66)

and

"the parents agreed with the suggestions that indifference or preoccupation were the main factors... a feeling that the school 'would attend to it' was a mark of confidence in the school" (p. 67).

The last statement may be a sign that unless something drastically goes wrong for a child in school, the parent may feel the school will cope with the situation, but if the result affects the child too much, he/she cares to be informed about the issue so that a decision to become involved or not can be made.

It would appear that the lower the educational level of the parent the less open he/she perceives his/her school to be and perhaps this results in a desire for less involvement on the parent's part.

Lucas and Lusthaus (1977) found in their study that:

"Using education as a key indicator of socio-economic status, the study found that the higher the educational level of parents, the more they perceived their schools as open" (p. 387).

The results of this study also appear to indicate that the higher the level of a parent's education, the more interest in involvement the parent has in school decisions.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Parents' perceptions of the school-home communication process as posed through analysis of the questions in Chapter I of this study are clearly indicated in the results.

For parents, the most important source of information from the school is through what their child relates to them at home. Therefore what the school does through its daily procedures, may be carried home by the child in one way or another. This would seem to be an area of community relations which schools could use to their advantage. By being more aware of the effect of the school surroundings, procedures and activities, they might be able to provide an environment which will have children carrying home positive and vital information which can enhance the school-community interaction process.

Other channels used by the school such as report cards, newsletter, Parent-Teacher conferences and parents' personal visits to the school appear to stand out in parents' minds as important paths of school-home communication. Both formal and informal, they also provide opportunities for direct and indirect contact with the community.

However, parents in this study felt the most effective method for them to communicate with the school was through the direct approach by phone, or in person, by Parent-Teacher conferences or work as a school volunteer. Although parents feel it is the most effective method (the direct approach) the

openness of the school will determine the ultimate success in their attempts to deal with the school. From information such as this schools should realize the importance of maintaining an open atmosphere which can then enhance the overall effectiveness of community relations. Schools might find more direct methods of working with parents to ensure theirs and their child's needs are being adequately met. Additional study on this issue might result in effective methods being developed which would create a direct communication channel between the school and the home of children in attendance at that school.

The issue of parent involvement in schools is a complex one and this study has just brushed the surface on how much involvement parents might want on a variety of issues. Depending on circumstances, the issues presented to them and their educational level, parents seem to have one common feeling on their degree of involvement in schools -- that is they like to be informed especially on major issues. One issue in particular however did merit an increased interest for involvement on the parents part, this being the learning problems of their son/daughter. The ability to make recommendations in a meeting seemed to be the greatest degree of involvement parents cared for on the afore-mentioned issue.

Presented with the six categories of parent involvement patterned after Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation and School Policy Formation, very few parents cared to have complete

control over decisions to be made on any of the issues presented to them. Even under the category of "Be part of a committee" - the idea of partnership - that is being a part of a school and/or community committee making decisions on the issues did not merit many choices by the parents. Again, perhaps the issues are not critical or volatile enough to warrant these high degrees of involvement or parents really feel that education is best left to the educators.

Occupation appeared to have no effect on parents' choices on the degree of involvement they would choose for the issues presented to them in this study. Further studies with a wider variety of occupations and a greater number of participants might reveal findings other than this in the relationship between parents and involvement with school decision-making.

Although occupation did not appear to have an effect on the degree of involvement parents wanted, the level of education did seem to have an effect. The higher the level of education, the greater the tendency was towards a greater involvement in school decision-making. The one exception to this was again the area of Learning Problems of the son/daughter of the parent. On this issue, all educational levels showed a pattern of higher involvement which did not appear on any of the other decision issues. It would be interesting to follow this higher level of education leading to greater degree of involvement with a more concentrated study which might pick out a more defined pattern for parent participation on school decision-making issues.

Only one school district was used in this study and it would be interesting to try this same questionnaire in another district or districts to determine if similar patterns would develop from the resulting data.

APPENDICES



APPENDIX A
SLOAN'S QUESTIONNAIRE (1973)

1. Please check, in the spaces provided at the left, all of the ways in which you learn about the school:

☐ From what my child tells me
☐ From what neighbor children tell me
☐ From conversations with adult friends or neighbors
☐ From the school newsletter (Beacon)
☐ From classroom newsletter
☐ From teacher notes and/or phone calls
☐ From scheduled parent teacher conferences
☐ From report cards
☐ From notes or phone calls directed to the school
☐ From personal visits to the school
☐ From classroom visitations and/or observations
☐ PTA Meetings
☐ Other (Please specify) _____

2. Now look at the list above again. Please mark an asterisk (*) next to the three ways which you believe are the best ways to learn about our school.
-

3. Listed below are several ways in which you, as parents, communicate with the school. Will you put a + beside any method which you think is very effective and an 0 beside the method which you think is least effective?

☐ Direct approach by phone, note, or in person
☐ Parent-teacher conferences
☐ Periodically scheduled "Open Forum" meetings
☐ PTA
☐ Representative Parent Council
☐ Surveys issued periodically by school office
☐ Other (Please specify) _____

4. Listed below are several topics which arise in two-way communications between home and school. Please check the column opposite each topic which best describes how you would like to be involved concerning it:

	I want to be informed	I want to participate in making decisions	I prefer no involvement of any kind
Purchase of major school items			
Hours of the school day			
Safety concerns			
Field trips			
What subjects are taught			
Size of class			
Clothing children wear to school (Dress code)			
Homework			
Pupil evaluation (Report card)			
New programs and/or changes			
Pupil disciplinary policies and procedures			
Lunch program			
Learning problems of my child			
Other (please specify)			

This survey has been completed by: Mother___; Father___;
 Mother and Father together___; for a child in grade(s): K___;
 1-3___; 4-6___.

Please use the back of this sheet to write any comments or suggestions you may have concerning communication between school and home. Thank you again for your assistance. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call me at 726-2254.

Mrs. B. Sloan

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE

Parent Perceptions on School-Home CommunicationsSchool District #34 (Abbotsford)

The attached questionnaire is being distributed to a randomly selected group of parents and guardians who have children attending the public schools in School District 34 (Abbotsford). It is hoped to use the information collected to improve the level of service of the schools in the district.

All replies will be held in strictest confidence. Please do not write your name on the questionnaire. Once the data are coded and transferred to computer tapes, the surveys will be destroyed.

If you have more than one child attending this school, please select only one of the children and answer the questions with that child in mind.

Kindly return the completed questionnaires in the enclosed addressed, postage-paid envelope at your earliest convenience. Complete summaries of the survey will be available through the School Board Office in September 1982.

If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact Mrs. J. Cattermole, Abbotsford Senior Secondary School at 853-3367.

Thank you for your cooperation.

1. Please check off from the list below the seven (7) most frequent information sources from which you learn about your son and/or daughter's school.

- ☐ 01. conversations with adult friends and/or neighbours
- ☐ 02. personal friendships with principal, teachers, trustees, or other educational staff
- ☐ 03. radio news or talk shows
- ☐ 04. local newspapers
- ☐ 05. teacher notes and/or phone calls
- ☐ 06. what neighbour's sons/daughters tell me
- ☐ 07. guided tours of the school
- ☐ 08. personal visits to the school
- ☐ 09. scheduled parent-teacher conferences
- ☐ 10. School Open House
- ☐ 11. my son/daughter's report card
- ☐ 12. other staff or people at school or those who deal with the school, e.g. custodial, school nurse, secretaries, supply agencies, etc.
- ☐ 13. school athletic activities
- ☐ 14. "meet-the-teacher" nights
- ☐ 15. what my son/daughter tells me
- ☐ 16. Education-In-Action Week
- ☐ 17. the school's newsletter
- ☐ 18. notes or phone calls you make to the school
- ☐ 19. other members of the community not mentioned above
- ☐ 20. other (please specify)

C.20

2. Now from the 20 information sources above, please give the number of the five (5) most important sources for you to learn about the school. Please list them in order of importance: #1 most important, #2 second most important.... Do not limit your answers to your choices in #1.

- ☐ 1. (most important)
- ☐ 2. (second most important)
- ☐ 3. (third most important)
- ☐ 4. (fourth most important)
- ☐ 5. (fifth most important)

C.25

3. Listed below are thirteen (13) ways in which you, as parents or guardians, may communicate with the school. Please indicate how effective you feel each way is in communicating your feelings/opinions to the school by using the following scale:

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

very effective very ineffective

Circle the number which best fits how you feel about each of the topics.

- | | | | | | |
|------|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 01. P.T.A. or similar group | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 02. direct approach by phone or in person to school | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 03. the informal network (e.g. social meeting with teacher and/or school district officials) | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 04. work as a school volunteer | |
| C.30 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 05. phone calls, notes or in person to school board office or trustees |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 06. Parent-Teacher conferences | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 07. messages sent with you son/daughter to the school | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 08. participation in more formal activities such as fund-raising, graduation, plays, etc. organized by the school | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 09. letters to the editor of the local newspaper | |
| C.35 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 10. open-line radio shows |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 11. parent-interest groups | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 12. surveys issued periodically by the school | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 13. other (please specify) | |

4. Schoolis sometimes seek the advice of parents or guardians on issues that are important to the school. Please check (✓) in the column to the right to indicate the extent of your preferred involvement with each matter described below.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	I feel no involvement with this matter on my part is necessary.	I would like to be informed on this matter.	I would like to express my opinion through an opinion poll or survey on this matter.	I would like to make suggestions or recommendations in a meeting on this matter.	I would like to be part of a school and/or community committee which makes decisions on this matter.	I would like to be a part of a parent committee which makes all final decisions on this matter.
1. purchase of major school items						
2. scholarships & awards						
3. hours of the school day						
4. clothing students wear to school (dress code)						
5. field trips						
6. safety concerns						
7. lunch program (cafeteria)						
8. athletic program/team travel						
9. graduation exercises & activities						
10. new or special program eg English as a Second Language, Work Study / Work Experience Research & Exploration						
11. pupil disciplinary policies & procedures						
12. subjects taught						
13. size of class						
14. homework						
15. pupil evaluation (Report Card)						
16. learning problems of my son/daughter						
17. other (please specify)						

The information requested here is essential to the analysis of this study. Please check (✓) the appropriate space in each item below. This survey is designed to be anonymous, so please do not write your name down.

This column
is for
computer
use only.

5. Person(s) completing this survey (respondents):

☐

C. 56

- ### 5.1 Father

- ## 5.2 Mother

- ### 5.3 Father & Mother

- #### 5.4 Guardian(s)

6. Occupation of respondent(s):

--	--	--

C. 57 58 59

- ## 6.1 Business & Professional

Father	Mother	Guardian(s)

- ## 6.2 Clerical

--	--	--

- ### 6.3 Skilled Labour

--	--	--	--

- #### 6.4 Unskilled Labour

--	--	--

- ## 6.5 Non-labour Force

--	--	--

- ## 6.6 Undesignated

--	--	--

7. Education of respondent(s):

--	--	--

C.60 61 62

- ### 7.1 Elementary School

Father	Mother	Guardian(s)

- ## 7.2 High school incomplete

--	--	--

- ### 7.3 High school graduation

--	--	--

- 7.4 Technical, trade
or other
business school
or training
beyond high
school

--	--	--

- 7.5 College incomplete

- ### 7.6 College graduate

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	-----

APPENDIX C
CHECK SLIP

It is important to maximize the number of returns I receive through this survey. To help in this regard would you please complete the information below and have your son/daughter return this form to the school. Do not return the survey to the school but mail it in the enclosed post-paid envelope. This will ensure your anonymity.

Thank you for your time and care in completing this questionnaire.

Name:

Address:

School:

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